

Report For: *On Our Own of Maryland, Inc.*
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Roles and Responsibilities of Board and Staff Questionnaire Results of Random Sampling of Maryland's Consumer Organizations

Overview

On December 9, 2008, a thirty-nine item questionnaire entitled *Roles and Responsibilities of Board and Staff* (based on M. L. Donnellan, 2000) was provided to a random sampling of adults who were Staff or Board Members affiliated with Maryland's consumer organizations. They had arrived from various locations across the state and were a few minutes early for a nonprofit training hosted by Own Our Own of Maryland, Inc. With permission, a questionnaire was distributed prior to the training to those willing to respond. The questionnaire asked whether *Board*, *Staff*, or *Both* was responsible for certain tasks related to organizational development. These included areas of *planning*, *policy*, *fundraising*, *financial management*, *personnel*, and *public relations*.

The purpose of administering the questionnaire was to provide a snapshot of current level of understanding of various roles and responsibilities of Board and Staff by the respondents. It was anticipated results would highlight present knowledge and help determine apparent and potential technical assistance needs. The process was voluntary and had minimal risk. No individual's names were gathered; however names of organizations represented were requested to show geographic involvement in the sample. Information from the questionnaire is reported in aggregate form. The questionnaire was simple, had limitations, and conclusions should be considered informative, but not absolute.

Examples of questions from the six areas explored follow:

1. planning (e.g. *Who sets specific program objectives?*);
2. policy (e.g. *Who gives input to developing policy?*);
3. fundraising (e.g. *Who develops funding resources?*);
4. financial management (e.g. *Who monitors how funds are spent each day?*);
5. personnel (e.g. *Who recruits, screens, hires ... the executive director?*)
6. public relations (e.g. *Who serves on boards of other organizations?*).

Process

Questionnaires were distributed at tables where people had gathered prior to a meeting. This scenario provided opportunity for several organizations to be represented at once. They were told the purpose of the form, asked to complete it (if willing), and to submit it once done.

Twenty-two persons completed the questionnaire. A multiple choice answer of *Board* or *Staff*, or *Both* was offered for each question. It took approximately twenty minutes to complete the survey. Other information gathered was date and organization represented.

Respondents identified themselves as representatives of the following eleven consumer groups: On Our Own of Howard County, Inc., On Our Own of Frederick County, Inc., On Our Own of Harford Road, Office of Consumer Advocates, Inc., On Our Own of Anne Arundel County, Inc., On Our Own of Calvert County, Inc., On Our Own of Prince George's County, Inc., On Our Own of St. Mary's County, Inc., Silver Spring Drop In Center., Hearts & Ears, Inc., and Helping Other People Through Empowerment. This represents roughly half of the formal consumer organizations in Maryland, many being independent 501c (3) entities.

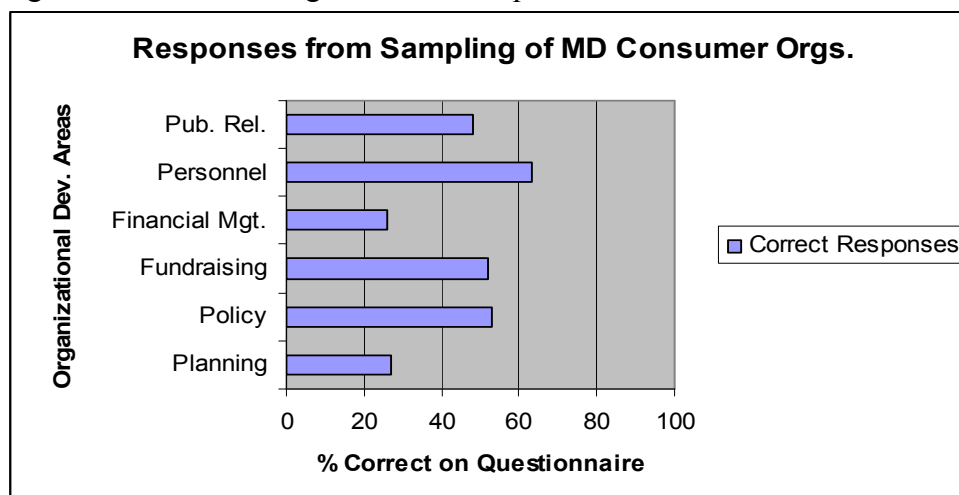
Results

It is important to emphasize that the questionnaire asked about identification of who was responsible for certain tasks (*Board*, *Staff*, or *Both*) – not how well tasks were being performed. How did respondents fair on this questionnaire? Figure 1 (below) depicts the percentage of questions answered correctly in each of the six areas of organizational development explored.

The highest score in any one area was 63% (understanding who is responsible for *personnel*) and the lowest scores fell in two areas, which included 26% (understanding who is responsible for *financial management*) and 27% (understanding who is responsible for *planning*). *Public relations* (48%), *fundraising* (52%), and *policy* (53%) fell in the middle range.

Individual scores for the entire questionnaire (all areas) ranged from a high of 31 correct to a low of 7 correct. Of the 39 questions asked, the mean score (average) of correct answers was 17. This suggests respondents were aware of less than half of the correct responses as to who was responsible for certain Board and Staff tasks.

Figure 1: Understanding Roles and Responsibilities of Boards and Staff



It is apparent from this sample's results there is great need for improved understanding by Maryland's consumer organizations of who performs specific roles and responsibilities by nonprofit boards and staff. (Staff includes the Executive Director.) To be fair, there were limitations to consider in reviewing results of this questionnaire. Those unavailable to take the questionnaire might have had more knowledge to contribute; some respondents came from newer organizations with minimal experience; and the questionnaire was limited in types and number of questions from which to make detailed observations.

Recommendations

With limitations recognized, the resulting data does provide information about areas in which raising awareness is important for Maryland's consumer organizations:

- Participants are in great need of a better understanding of the roles and responsibilities of boards and staff in the area of *planning*. This includes learning who determines funding levels that are needed. Who determines long range plans for the organization? Who determines which community needs should be met and to what extent? *Planning* is an area where 27% of participants gave correct responses.
- *Financial management* is another area where better understanding of roles and responsibilities is greatly needed (26% gave correct responses). This includes knowing who prepares the organization's budget and monitors the total funding picture.
- In *fundraising* (52% correct responses) it would be helpful for participants to increase awareness as to who develops the fundraising plan and evaluates its success.
- Some help is needed by participants in understanding roles and responsibilities in areas of *policy* (53% correct responses) and *public relations* (48% correct responses). Who provides policy background information? Who develops and implements a public relations plan?? Participants had some understanding of these areas; however would benefit from further clarification.
- In the area of *personnel*, those who answered the questionnaire seemed to have a basic understanding (63% correct responses) of who hires and terminates staff, who trains staff and volunteers, and who evaluates the performance of a director. There was some question as to who determines an organization's personnel policy.

It is recommended that technical assistance is provided to increase the level of understanding by Maryland's consumer organizations about the roles and responsibilities of board and staff in nonprofit agencies. In the short term, orientations to boards and staff should be given. Books, handouts, and online resources can be disseminated. Those

on-site with knowledge and experience in specific areas can be utilized to help others. Technical assistance should be customized to each location, as possible.

It is also suggested technical assistance occur periodically throughout the fiscal year and beyond to improve the knowledge and capacity of Maryland's consumer organizations. Assistance can come from in-house experts as well as consultants with nonprofit management expertise. Activities to increase awareness include workshops, conferences, development of educational materials, pre-packaged courses, teleconferences, webinars, informational articles/handouts, and hands on assistance. There are web-based sites with good information; however, each should be screened for accuracy.

Understanding roles and responsibilities of board and staff is vital for consumer organizations to successfully provide needed services, sustain the organization, and to engage in a more fulfilling role within the community. Increased knowledge and resulting application regarding these areas will improve the overall performance and success of Maryland's consumer organizations. It is timely and commendable that a workshop on *Nonprofit Development and Fundraising* was conducted for consumer organizations the day this questionnaire was administered. A series of such trainings will contribute to the continued growth and benefit of consumer operated services in Maryland.